

## Book Review

**D.J.E. Whibley (1992).** *Acacias of South Australia*. Second Edition, revised by D.E. Symon. Adelaide: Government Printer.

Though it retains the many good features of the original book, this second edition is a result of a complete revision of the first, with additional text, many new illustrations, accounts of more species (some described here for the first time) and (almost) up-to-date nomenclature. I expect the book will be used primarily for the identification of species and it has all that such a volume requires: namely, good keys and illustrations and descriptions not cluttered up with unnecessary details.

The keys are clear, well set out and are helped by small line-drawings that illustrate all of the species in the six groups recognised. These are additional to the line-drawings that accompany the descriptions and photographs of each species. The keys work well except in a few cases where there is some doubt about the distinctness of the species keyed. *Acacia cupularis*-*A. ligulata*, *Acabagei*-*A. georginae* and *A. imbricata*-*A. triquetra* are species pairs where key characters are not wholly convincing, possibly because one species of the pair should be treated only as a subspecies or variety of the other.

Species descriptions are short but list the macroscopic features most useful in identification. The structure of the flowers which is sometimes useful in deciding relationships is not described or illustrated; rightly so I think as anything that requires  $\times 10$  magnification is usually more of a distraction than a help. The line drawings are excellent and useful aids to identification. Figures 8 and 9 should be of great help to newcomers to the identification of Australian acacias in general.

The colour photographs are on the whole of good quality though the very nature of the subject limits their usefulness. Probably because of the harsh Mediterranean climate many South Australian acacias are low twiggy shrubs with yellow inflorescences. Compare, for ex-

ample, the photographs of *A. microcarpa*, *A. dodonaeifolia*, *A. calamifolia* and *A. merrallii*; and are the photographs of *A. stowardii* and *A. cibaria* really of different species? On the other hand, the photographs of *A. minyura* and *A. aneura* var. *conifera*, both recently described but not illustrated, are welcome, especially as the latter is distinguished from *A. aneura* var. *aneura* solely on the habit of the plant: 'branches horizontal (Christmas tree effect)' versus 'branches more or less erect or spreading'.

This revised edition of the handbook is notable for the supplementary material written by David Symon. In a nine page introduction he gives a description of the 'genus' and an account of its biology, naturally emphasising South Australian species. Included is a brief summary of the taxonomy of *Acacia* where the awkward question of *Racosperma* is raised and dealt with in an even-handed manner. I suspect that many botanists with first hand knowledge of Mimosaceae would agree that more than 98% of Australian acacias do not belong in *Acacia*, but buyers of the book need not be concerned as a change to *Racosperma* or any other genus is unlikely in the foreseeable future.

As well as the introductory material, notes have been added to the accounts of some species. As befits its importance, ecologically and to the pastoral industry, *A. aneura* has three pages devoted to it while *A. cyclops*, *A. saligna* and *A. mearnsii* are also well treated. These notes read like random jottings, not structured or placed in any particular order. None-the-less they are interesting; I would like to know more about the doughty men and their dog of the wattle-bark industry pictured on p. 9. A secondary effect of the extended introduction and notes has been the compilation of an excellent bibliography. Anyone beginning a serious study of *Acacia* in Australia needs only to take in the 210 entries.

Though the nomenclature is very nearly up-to-date there is one possibly significant omission. The treatment of mulga adopted follows Randell (1992) who has gone some way to solving long-standing problems in the complex. However, her transfer of *A. aneura* var. *latifolia* to *A. ayersiana* is not warranted taxonomically and produces serious practical difficulties. In a short paper published too late for consideration in the volume under review, I reduced *A. ayersiana* to a variety of *A. aneura* (Pedley 1992), so that *A. aneura* consists of five varieties: var. *aneura*, var. *ayersiana*, var. *conifera*, var. *latifolia* and var. *macrocarpa*. An alternative and possibly better solution to the problem might be to treat *A. ayersiana* as a narrowly circumscribed species restricted to Uluru and vicinity.

A minor consequence of Randell's work has been the reinstatement of *A. cibaria* for the species known, in eastern Australia at least, as *A. brachystachya*, which Randell considered a *nomen dubium*. Rather confusingly *A. brachystachya nomen dubium* is placed here in the synonymy of both *A. aneura* and *A. cibaria*. If the name is dubious perhaps it should be treated as such and not placed in the synonymy of any species.

The incomplete coverage of *A. aneura*-*A. ayersiana* is of no great moment for South

Australian readers and probably could not have been avoided, but one deficiency of the book could certainly have been rectified. Regions of South Australia are named in the distribution of individual species and identified only by number in the potentially useful chart (pp. 311–313) but there is no map and no key to the numbers on the chart!

With the possible exception of the last, the faults of this book are minor. From the eye-catching cover photograph of *Woven mulga sticks* 'sculpted' by Andy Goldsworthy to the equally eye-catching photograph of the aril of *A. cyclops* (p. 241) the volume is an attractive one. The book is recommended to all people, amateur and professional, interested in acacias in Australia, particularly South Australia. Even owners of the first edition should acquire this revised one for the additional species, extra maps and extensive bibliography. The handbook committee should be congratulated on its production, and Mr David Symon on making a good book an even better one.

## References

- PEDLEY, L. (1992). A further note on *Acacia aneura* (Mimosoideae: Leguminosae). *Australian Systematic Botany* 5: 767–768.
- RANDELL, B. (1992). Mulga. A revision of the major species. *Journal of the Adelaide Botanic Gardens* 14: 105–132.

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